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ABSTRACT

A study of the writing abilities of high school and college students in Florida uncovered specific problem areas in teaching and curriculum design. Recommendations for alleviating writing deficiencies of high school students before they get to the university include a writing training program for prospective and inservice high school teachers, writing coursework as a recertification requirement, a decrease in teaching load for high school English teachers, stricter English admission requirements at the university level, and an equal concentration of school districts' efforts toward the development of both marginal and successful students. Additional recommendations for improving the writing skills of University of Florida students include disallowing College Level Examination Program (CLEP) credit, requiring a placement test of all entering freshmen, testing all students again at the beginning of their junior year with both an objective and an essay exam, requiring satisfactory writing in every discipline in the university, and providing the writing laboratory with additional staffing resources. (A list of the schools visited in the study, a recommended school policy for writing skills, and descriptions of suggested writing tests are appended.) (AEA)

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REPORT OF THE TASKFORCE ON COMPOSITION

May 19, 1978

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Although inadequate writing skills among college students have been for years a chronic complaint of professors, there is considerable evidence that the students' inability to write has become acutely serious. The National Assessment of Educational Progress,[1] Ronald Berman (former director of the National Endowment for the Humanities),[2] the University of California at Berkeley and the Johns Hopkins University,[3] A. Bartlett Giamatti, the President of Yale,[4] and others have recognized the decline in a variety of ways. Verbal scores on SAT tests have steadily declined for more than ten years;[5] enrollment in remedial English at the University of California, Berkeley, which draws its students from the top 12.5% of high-school graduating classes, jumped from about 25% to around 50% of the freshman class in only seven years;[6] the Yale English Department has voted to reinstate English 10 "because so many Yale students cannot handle English";[7] a major state university is reported in the Chronicle of Higher Education as having increased its number of remedial English students by 250% in a 3-year period (1970-1974) and this increase is "not [from] minority kids but WASPS from supposedly good high schools";[8] according to the Associated Press 75% of the freshmen at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in the fall of 1975 did "poorly" on a writing test and were required to enroll in a composition course.[9]

Certainly many competent and informed people feel there is a serious problem. A survey in 1974 by the Association of Departments of English found widespread concern among department chairmen that "students are coming from high school with a far less firm grasp on fundamentals than before--middle-class as well as disadvantaged students."[10] William Schaefer, executive secretary of the 30,000 member Modern Language Association, is quoted by the Chronicle: "My impression is that on a national level we have failed--have continued to fail--to meet the challenge of illiteracy among college-level

students."[11]

Surely there is a problem and one of serious dimensions. A variety of causes for the decline of writing skills has been suggested. What has been described by one critic as "the linguistic sludge of television"[12] is most often cited as the culprit. Though we are not certain of the precise connection between reading and writing, the argument goes that television has reduced the amount of reading that students do while in high school and writing skills have inevitably suffered. Television has even entered the schools: a student from the University of California concluded "In high school they taught us courses like 'The Mass Media' instead of the essentials of English, and that's why I ended up in Subject A [Remedial English]."[13]

Another possible cause has been variously described as "a new primitivism,"[14] the sentimentality of the Free Speech Movement,[15] and a movement away from rationality in the 1960's.[16] As one teacher put it "'For many years everything was the mind, the cognitive.' Students today 'touch a lot more,' he said, and express their feelings more freely, but 'the cognitive skills have to some degree suffered.'"[17] Another teacher expressed a similar opinion: "I think that the high schools have let us down. . . . They're teaching students how to feel, I suppose, but not how to think and learn and write."[18] A. Bartlett Giamatti attributed the decline in our abilities to express ourselves in writing to efforts in the 60's and early 70's "to compress language to a single unambiguous medium of exchange." He goes on to say, "The first shot in the revolution in 1964 was the Free Speech Movement. It was intended not only to free speech from middle-class constraints about uttering obscenities, for instance. It was also intended to free us from the shackles of syntax, the racism of grammar, the elitism of style."[19] In the words of another critic there is loose in the land "a new primitivism with its monosyllabic vocabulary."[20]

While television and the new primitivism are problems of the whole society,

there have been more immediate causes alleged for the decline in writing skills found in the schools. Perhaps they can best be loosely grouped as problems in teaching and problems in what is taught, though the two areas overlap. We will first list the problems as we see them in their respective groups and then treat them at greater length as we make our recommendations.

Instruction

[21]

1. Teachers of writing are themselves sometimes unable to write well.
2. Teachers of writing may have had little or no instruction in how to teach writing.
3. Teachers of writing may not have had instruction in traditional [22] English grammar.
4. English classes may be taught by teachers who are not certified or qualified to teach English.
5. Teaching loads and other activities in high schools make difficult or impossible adequate instruction in composition.

Curriculum

6. Confusion over competing grammars--traditional, transformational-generative, structuralist, etc.--has meant that students and teachers do not have a common vocabulary to talk about writing.
7. The elective system which has been in practice for many years in most American high schools has made it possible for students to avoid courses which require reading and writing.
8. The abandonment of written entrance and placement tests and of required freshman composition in colleges and universities has contributed to a deemphasis on writing in the high schools.
9. The legislatively mandated credit for College Level Examination Program examinations (CLEP) at the 50th percentile has exempted from English many students who are not proficient writers and has further put in jeopardy the Advanced Placement Program

in the high schools, a program of exemption with credit far superior in every respect to CLEP.

10. Attrition of writing skills in college juniors may be the result of little required writing in their college courses. The decline in writing assignments in all academic fields at every level of education is the result perhaps of continual increase in class size.

The Taskforce realizes that a substantial proportion of high school students will not go on to college. We do not suggest that high schools should tailor their entire program to meet the needs of potential University of Florida students or even of college-bound students generally. The Taskforce is addressing in this report only those problems which will diminish the college-bound student's chances of success in college. Nor has the Taskforce been cavalier in arriving at its recommendations. We have tried to assess the impact that our decisions would have on high-school teachers and their students. Taskforce members have therefore visited twenty-eight high schools, which sent a total of 753 freshmen to the University of Florida in September of 1977, about 25% of the freshman class. In addition we have spoken at two district-wide meetings of English department chairmen representing twenty-one high schools (some of which we had visited) and these high schools contributed another 203 students or about 7% of the fall 1977 freshman class at Florida. We spoke with some fifty English teachers from an entire county, representing nine high schools which sent another 135 students. We have spoken with language-arts supervisors in six counties and to the State Department of Education Language Arts Consultant.

Our interest has always been to be more helpful to high-school teachers as they try to improve the writing skills of their students. We therefore make the following recommendations with the advice of high-school teachers throughout the state.[23]

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING THE WRITING SKILLS OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Instruction

1. The University of Florida English Department must work out a program of training in writing and the teaching of writing for prospective and in-service high school teachers.

In the secondary education program in English at the University of Florida, according to the chairman of the Language Arts Program Area, Department of Subject Specialization, Teacher Education, of the College of Education, "Approximately one-fourth to one-fifth of the class-time" in a single course--EDS 474--"is devoted specifically to the teaching of composition with supplementary experiences deriving from the interrelationships between writing and the other language arts--reading, speaking, listening, and viewing."[24] In the program for primary school language arts teachers only "eight [two-hour sessions] are devoted to composition."[25] Obviously, in both cases the preparation of teachers to deal with student writing problems is inadequate. It is true that secondary English programs include a composition requirement, but only one course in writing is required and that requirement can be satisfied with a course in the writing of poetry.[26] No course to train teachers to deal with student writing is required.

Prospective English teachers ought to be required to take courses in expository and argumentative writing at an advanced level. In addition, a course should be offered by the English Department for undergraduates in secondary programs, a course similar to the one

presently offered at the graduate level and required of teaching assistants, that would train teachers of composition. Most teachers in the state to whom we have talked feel that a course which trains prospective teachers to talk to students about their writing should be required in all secondary programs, not just language arts programs, on the grounds that we will never solve the problem of inadequate writing skills if students are expected to write well only in English classes. Teachers in other disciplines must require written work, mark that work if it is inadequate, and talk intelligibly to students about their writing. At least one high school has already achieved consensus among all faculty to do just that (see Appendix 2).

But we cannot solve our problems by concentrating on prospective secondary teachers. Some program must be devised for the training of in-service teachers. The teachers we have talked to feel a need for such work and would be willing to take it; they were pleased that an English department was interested in offering it.

A model for in-service teacher training in composition is the Bay Area Writing Project in California.[27] The Project has been extended beyond the San Francisco Bay Area with similar programs in Los Angeles and Phoenix and this summer a program will be tried in the Tampa Bay Area. There would have to be some modification of Bay Area Writing Project for use in Florida, perhaps, but we are developing a class of specialists in composition for the first time in the higher education[28] and the English Department at the University of Florida could begin such work in the near future and is willing to do so.

2. The number of "professional" courses for secondary certification should be reduced. The College of Education at the University of

Florida has for years required forty hours of education courses while the state requirement is thirty. Teachers from all over the state feel that they should have had more courses in their discipline and fewer professional courses, fewer even than the thirty hours required by the State. The University of Florida is perhaps unique in requiring more "professional" credits than credits in English for English certification.

3. For recertification, either by points or by credits, English teachers ought to be required to take work designed to improve their competence in the teaching of writing. Such a requirement would have to be instituted by the Department of Education, which has already instituted a similar requirement for work in reading.

4. Every effort must be made to decrease the student load of high school English teachers. The high school teacher cannot require writing and mark that writing or give any individual attention to students if he or she has 150 to 180 students to teach in five classes a day, five days a week. (In some schools teachers have five preparations a day.) If a teacher with 150 students spends only twenty minutes a week on each student's papers, the total time spent comes to fifty hours a week and does not include class time or time for class preparation, let alone time for other required duties. It's an impossible task. If class loads of 150 or more seem like an exaggeration, a young teacher, unfortunately typical, in a large, good urban high school teaches five classes a day five days a week and these include four classes in advanced composition with 35 students per class. Dade County last year contemplated increasing high school teaching loads from five classes to six.

Vocational programs in the high schools have been able to limit

the size of classes, often substantially below those of English teachers. Remedial classes for students who have failed the functional literacy test have been limited in some school districts to fifteen students. It is certainly possible to limit class loads for teachers of writing if adequate writing skills are seen as a priority.

The National Council of Teachers of English has recommended a maximum student load of 100 per week for English teachers. We endorse that proposal and feel that the University of Florida ought to do everything in its power to work toward that goal for high-school English teachers if we ever expect the attention to reading and writing which all secondary students deserve.

5. The University ought to inform high schools of the performance of their students at the University. There is apparently no communication between the university which receives the students and the high-school teacher who sends them. If students do badly in composition, mathematics, or science, the high-school teacher ought to know that; if students do well, the teacher ought to know that, too. Surely there are problems of privacy but these could be worked out. And we would not want the information to be used as any kind of accountability measure. We are motivated in our recommendation only by the desire to be helpful to high-school teachers, many of whom have told us they would profit by such information. Surely the registrar's office could develop an information system which would serve the needs of the high schools. (This kind of information ought also to be sent to community colleges from which transfer students come.)

6. As it is able to do so, the English Department at the University of Florida ought to offer to grade sets of high-school papers from

college-preparatory English classes in composition. Students can find out about university standards and expectations long before they come here or go to similar institutions. They can thereby tailor their high-school work so that their chances of success in college will be better. The English Department has already graded sets of papers and taught classes as well at local high schools and we have been told by high-school teachers that their students have profited greatly. Paper grading can be done on a modest scale with relatively little money. Ideally other colleges and universities in the state might share such work to the benefit of all of us.

Curriculum

1. For admission, the University of Florida should require that all freshmen have four years of high-school English. Substitutions of speech, journalism, humanities, drama, and so forth should not be accepted. The four years of English should include one year of grammar and expository writing, and courses in English, American and world literature.[29] Required literature courses should not necessarily be year-long courses, but students should not be allowed to satisfy the requirement with single quinmester or mini-courses.

When we proposed such a requirement to high school teachers and supervisors around the state, we were surprised by the almost universal agreement with which it was met. Teachers felt that the requirement would strengthen their hands with students, those at least who wished to go to college. While we are perfectly aware that knowledge of traditional grammar will not improve writing, teachers feel and we feel that a knowledge of traditional grammar provides a common vocabulary with which to talk about writing. Students who don't know what

a clause is cannot be expected to punctuate differently restrictive and non-restrictive clauses. Literature was included in the requirement both for its own sake and because reading can strengthen writing.[30] We do not mean to prevent students from taking speech, journalism, drama, and humanities, but we have been assured by high school teachers that there is flexibility enough in students' schedules to allow them to take both English and elective courses.

The admission requirements of four years of high-school English should become effective at least by 1982 or as much earlier as possible without injustice to entering students. Exceptions to the admission requirements would have to be made for students from small, rural high schools which could not offer sufficient work.

2. Concentration on basic skills and functional literacy cannot occupy all efforts of school districts. The recently-instituted eleventh-grade functional literacy examinations and student performance on them have led many in education to give almost exclusive attention to marginal students. While we do not feel that such students should be ignored, they cannot occupy the interest of faculty and administrators to the exclusion of more academically successful students. In one county, for example, certified English teachers were taken out of regular English classes and placed in remedial classes. Their places were taken in regular English classes--ninth-grade grammar, ninth-grade literature, ninth-grade basic literature, tenth-grade language, tenth-grade composition, eleventh-twelfth-grade communications (a writing skills course), corrective reading and developmental reading--by the following teachers: a driver's education-social studies teacher, a coach, two social studies teachers, two work experience teachers, a physics teacher and a biology teacher.

In one high school in one county, sixteen regular English classes are being taught by people out of field, people described by the department chairman as "not by any stretch of the imagination certified (or in some cases even qualified) to teach English." If the functional literacy test determines what happens in all high-school English classes, we are in for a further decline in the skills of college students.

Only 8% of Florida high-school students failed the functional literacy test in communications skills (36% in mathematics). On the other hand, the most recent census figures (for 1976) show that 38.8% of the population between the ages of 18 and 24 are enrolled in college. It can certainly be argued that the communication skills of the college-preparatory student deserve the attention that is accorded those who fail the functional literacy test. It can certainly be argued that the college-preparatory student deserves as much attention as the vocational student, whose classes remain small while composition classes burgeon. If the means are available to keep the vocational or remedial teacher's class load a reasonable one, cannot the means be found to make the composition teacher's class load a possible one?

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING THE WRITING SKILLS OF UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA STUDENTS

Thus far our report has dealt with strengthening the writing skills of students before they get to the University. We also make the following recommendations for dealing with the writing problems of students after they arrive at the University, either as freshmen or as transfer students:

1. Every effort ought to be made by the University to disallow CLEP credit or at the very least to raise the cutoff score substantially and to require the essay portion which CLEP has begun to offer. On this last requirement we are in agreement with the College Conference on Composition and Communication resolution which would not allow exemption from a writing course on the basis of an examination which did not include a writing sample. The CLEP exams, for which this state has awarded hundreds of thousands of hours of college credit, have been repudiated by organizations of teachers throughout the country. The Taskforce on Composition is not opposed to exemption—quite the contrary. The Advanced Placement program, which awards college credit on the basis of high-school courses and test scores, has been a striking success. Perhaps the most frightening aspect of the wholesale awarding of credit for CLEP tests is that CLEP, by a kind of Gresham's Law, is destroying the Advanced Placement program. High-school students know that they can get much more credit for much less work through CLEP than through Advanced Placement. Advanced Placement classes, among the very best for college-preparatory students, are in real jeopardy among the state's high schools.[31]

2. Entering freshmen at the University of Florida should be required to take an objective and a written test, not for admission, but for placement (see Appendix 3 for an analysis of available tests). Such a test would require some expense, but not a great deal. The bulk of the freshmen (80%) could take the exam during summer orientation. The exam could be read by faculty trained to read essay exams in a standardized way (ETS has trained readers in this way for years).. Students would then be placed in ENC 1102 (EH 111), Expository Writing, or exempted and placed in ENC 1418 (EH 112), Argument and Persuasion,

or exempted from both. The question of whether to exempt with or without credit would have to be addressed. If students with CLEP credit (some 20% of the freshman class) could not be required to take ENC 1102 or ENC 1418 or any English for that matter, there would be no necessity to give them a placement test, but the Taskforce believes, as we have said, that CLEP should not be used, at least without the writing sample, to exempt students.

At the end of ENC 1102 students ought also to be exemptible from ENC 1418 (either with or without credit) on the basis of a recommendation fron their ENC 1102 instructor and their passing of an essay exam. (Not all 1102 students would be tested, only those recommended for exemption.) But, unless exempted, all freshmen should be required to take ENC 1102 and ENC 1418.[32] Such a requirement would necessitate increased faculty in English.[33]

3. At the beginning of the junior year all students should be tested again with both an objective and an essay exam. Engineering has given such a test for years with some increase recently in the number who fail it.[34] Engineering students who fail the screening examination twice must take a writing course taught by the English Department. Those students must pass the course in order to graduate from the College of Engineering.

A similar system could be used with all beginning juniors, but it would be expensive. The test itself could be handled at a modest expense, but the instruction of students who failed the test would be a major undertaking. At present virtually no junior is required to take an English course of any kind, let alone a writing course.

He or she has almost certainly completed general education requirements in English during the first two years. As many as 2305 students (30% of the 6783 juniors) or more could conceivably be required to take a composition course. At twenty per section we would need an additional fifteen faculty in English if thosefifteen taught nothing but composition, a practice which is undesirable.

It was possible in the past to turn such work over to teaching assistants, but it is no longer possible to do so. The English Department has intentionally cut back its graduate program in the face of a terrible job market. And in fact no university is getting the number of highly qualified applicants it had even a few years ago.[35] The composition courses would have to be staffed with faculty either permanent or adjunct, but staffing would be very expensive. The English Department cannot in its present circumstances handle more work: it has suffered a 23% loss of faculty in the last five years and a 22% increase in enrollments. It cannot turn all its efforts to composition or it will cease to be an English Department.

Community College teachers tell us that a junior level placement examination will help them in their efforts to improve composition instruction. It will encourage students to elect composition work and will help teachers get the necessary resources from their administrations to handle competently such instruction.

4. Juniors would be better able to write if they were required to write and their writing was required to be satisfactory in every discipline in the University.

5. Additional resources ought to be provided to the Writing Laboratory in the Office of Instructional Resources. Trained staff can deal with specific weaknesses of students who don't need a whole course to remedy their problems. The Writing Laboratory is not now able to provide such help as it has only two part-time people and occasional OPS support. Substantial resources would have to be given the Writing Laboratory if it is to be expected to deal in numbers with students' writing disabilities. On the other hand, faculty in all disciplines who required writing could find help for students in the Laboratory.

The Taskforce has taken what it regards as only the first step in trying to solve the problem of declining writing skills among college students. We have opened communication and cooperation with the high schools. That work needs to be continued and expanded, not by the English Department alone, but by the University as a whole. In addition, greater communication needs to be opened with middle schools and primary schools in an effort to help in the coordination of the various levels of education, to disseminate information in order to enhance instruction, to train teachers to deal better with student writing problems.

All of this is an enormous undertaking for a single university. But there are opportunities to enlist the aid of community colleges and four-year colleges and universities, both public and private, in the State. In the fall we will present the Taskforce Report to the Florida Association of Departments of English, composed of department chairman of two- and four-year colleges and universities throughout the state. We will invite other colleges to endorse the recommendations in the Report and participate in efforts to improve writing instruction.

The improvement of writing may just be <u>the</u> challenge to be met by higher

education in the next few decades, if A. Bartlett Giamatti is right:

> I believe that all of us are what we say we are--that as individuals and as a people we define through language what we have, and what we will be, and that a group of people who cannot clearly and precisely speak and write will never be a genuine society. We shape ourselves and our institutions, and we and our institutions are shaped, through those individual acts of negotiation between ourselves and our language. Without respect for its awesome power we can never find out who we are, and thus never have to leave the child's garden of feeling and enter the city--that is, become citizens. . . . Language is the medium in which the race lives, it is what we have brought from our past, and it is what has brought us from our past--our link with who we are and who we want to be.[36]

We have not been talking in our Report merely about the mechanics of writing--spelling, agreement, punctuation. We have been talking about writing as a means to knowledge--scientific, social, humanistic. If we lose the skills of language, we will lose a power to think, and with that loss will go access to much of what we call civilizaton. Writing is enormously important: it is, as Sheridan Baker says, "our chief means, as individuals, of discovering knowledge, and eventually of discovering values and what is valid . . . . [O]nly by realizing--making real--our new ideas by writing them out do we really discover them fully and as our own. We discover what we know by writing it out, bringing up from our tumbling mists of thought and intuition, our perpetual daydreams, those concepts we hardly knew we had."[37]

Writing is, then, worth our efforts. There has never been more national interest in teaching students to write well; there has never been more interest among students in learning to write well. Our combined efforts at bringing these two interests successfully together stand a good chance of being rewarded.

Footnotes

[1] See Merrill Sheils, "Why Johnny Can't Write," Newsweek, 8 Dec. 1975, p. 58.

[2] Ronald Berman, "On Writing Good."

[3] Don Speich, "UC Moves to Tighten Rules for Admission," Reprinted from the Los Angeles Times, 31 October 1976; also see Gene I. Maerhoff, "Rise in Remedial Work Taxing Colleges," New York Times, 7 Mar. 1976, p. 1, col. 7 and p. 14, col. 1: "One of the country's most highly selective institutions, Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, where it is said that 'horrendous' writing has shown up even in doctoral dissertations, is weighing the imposition of a compulsory composition course for students who cannot pass a placement test.

[4] "Sentimentality," Yale Alumni Magazine, January 1976, pp. 17 - 19.

[5] Cheryl M. Fields, "Why the Big Drop in S.A.T. Scores?" Chronicle of Higher Education XV, No. 1, (6 Sept. 1977), 1, 13. Scores on the verbal test have declined from 478 in 1963 to 429 in 1977.

[6] Giamatti, p. 17. There is some confusion about this figure: Shirley Boes Neill says that of the freshmen at Berkeley in 1975-76 45% were required to take subject A, "a proportion that had been fairly constant for several years." "How to Improve Student Writing," American Education 12 (Oct. 1976), 7. On all University of California campuses combined 63% of the entering students scored "less than acceptable on the English Composition Test (ECT) of the College Entrance Examination Board. By 1975, the unacceptable scores had grown

to 75 percent." Ted Hulbert, "A Plague of Illiteracy," p. 4.

7 Giamatti, p. 17.

8 Malcolm G. Scully, "Crisis in English Writing," Chronicle of Higher Education IX, No. 1 (23 September 1974), p. 1.

9 "New Students Don't Want to Read, Can't Write, University Reports," Miami Herald, 28 Nov. 1975, p. 6B.

10 Scully, "Crisis in English Writing," p. 1.

11 Ibid.

12 Hulbert, p. 3.

13 Ibid. It is instructive that the student says, "they taught us" rather than "we elected." The point seems to be that he should have been required to take essentials of English rather than allowed to choose "The Mass Media."

14 Ibid.

15 Giamatti, p. 18.

16 George Shapiro in Maureen Smith, "The Case of the Incredible Shrinking Students." Update (A Publication for Friends of the University of Minnesota), III, No. 3 (Winter, 1976), p. 2.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Carla Philips in Smith, p. 2.

[19] op. cit. p. 18

[20] Hulbert, p. 3.

[21] Hulbert, p. 3. One of the imperatives of The Bay Area Writing Project is "that teachers themselves know how to write, and, in fact, do write." See Neill, p. 8.

[22] Del Fambrough, a teacher of English for sixteen years at Lawrence High School in Lawrence, Kansas, makes the following observations: "Schools of education are failing us. They are sending us teachers who know nothing whatever about English grammar." She goes on to add, "Though we still teach English literature (sadly, we no longer require it), they are sending us teachers who have never had a course in either English literature or English history." "Miss Thistlebottom, where are you?" Kansas Alumni, Fall, 1976, p. 25.

[23] See Appendix 1 for a list of high schools contacted.

[24] In a letter to the Vice President for Academic Affairs dated March 22, 1977.

[25] In a response dated March 16, 1977 to The Vice President for Academic Affairs' request for information.

26 There is little question about the inadequacy of present composition requirements in secondary programs: "Robert F. Hogan, executive secretary of the National Council of Teachers of English, an organization that includes both high-school and college teachers, says it is now possible for a future teacher of high school English to go all the way through high school, college, and into the teaching profession without having had a course in composition since the ninth grade." Scully, "Crisis in English Writing," p. 6.

27 For a description of the project and the reaction of two participants to it, see Neill, op. cit. 6 - 12.

28 The English Department, for example, has offered an appointment to a specialist in the theory and practice of composition who has worked a good part of this past year with the Los Angeles Writing Project. He has also published widely on problems in both reading and writing.

29 If a literature requirement in high schools needs a defense, we would ask, as Del Fambrough has asked, " Where else in the world, I wonder, can a student graudate from his country's equivalent of high school, let alone a university, without having studied his native literature?" Op. cit. p. 25.

30 The New York Times in a recent study of the records of 380,000 students determined that "New York City high school students are taking fewer and fewer academically demanding courses. . . ." At the same time, and perhaps consequently, as the Times points out, "every one of the undergraduate units of the City University was receiving more poorly prepared students from the city's high schools than they did five years ago." "Rigorous High School Courses Attract Fewer in New York City," New York Times, 23 March 1978, Sec. A, p. 1. col. 1; Sec. B, p. 12, col. 1.

31

A case in point is Boca Raton High School, which next year will drop its Advanced Placement classes in English because students are not registering for them in sufficient number. Of the thirty-one students enrolled in Advanced Placement classes this year at Boca Raton, only one took the Advanced Placement test for college credit.

32

In 1976 the Modern Language Association approved the following resolution:

> Whereas college students throughout the country seem to exhibit a marked lack of competence in writing, be it resolved that the Modern Language Association recommends the reinstatement of the freshman composition requirement in college and universities that have dropped the requirement or allowed literature courses to supplant it.

33

The English Department presently offers about 115 sections of ENC 1102 in the fall but only about 30 sections of ENC 1418 in the winter, because 1418 is not required. If CLEP credit were disallowed, 1102 enrollments would certainly increase some in the fall even with exemptions. ENC 1418 would have to be increased by 70 sections or more in the winter if it were required. Though there would be a consequent reduction in other freshman English courses, that would not offset the increase in 1418 because the enrollment caps are 20 in 1102 and 1418, 25 in other freshman English courses. The English Department would have to have an increase in faculty to meet this requirement.

34

In the fall of 1977, 31% of those taking the Engineering Screening Test failed it, though the passing mark had been lowered from 70 to 60.

35

See Malcolm G. Scully, "In Grad Schools, Unhappy Trends," Chronicle of Higher Education XVI, No. 9 (April 1978), p. 7.

36 Op. cit. p. 19

37 "Writing as Discovery," ADE Bulletin No. 43 (November, 1974), 34.

APPENDIX I

HIGH SCHOOLS VISITED

High School	City	County
Cardinal Gibbons	Ft. Lauderdale	Broward
Nova Senior	Ft. Lauderdale	Broward
Bucholz Jr.-Sr.	Gainesville	Alachua
Eastside	Gainesville	Alachua
Gainesville	Gainesville	Alachua
P.K. Yonge Laboratory School	Gainesville	Alachua
Bolles	Jacksonville	Duval
Terry Parker School	Jacksonville	Duval
R. E. Lee	Jacksonville	Duval
Sandalwood Jr.-Sr.	Jacksonville	Duval
Samuel W. Wolfson Senior	Jacksonville	Duval
D. V. Fletcher	Neptune Beach	Duval
Lakeland	Lakeland	Polk
Seminole	Seminole	Pinellas
North Miami Beach	N. Miami Beach	Dade
Orange Park	Orange Park	Clay
Edgewater	Orlando	Orange
Palm Beach Gardens	Palm Beach Gardens	Palm Beach
Northeast	St. Petersburg	Pinellas
St. Petersburg Catholic	St. Petersburg	Pinellas
Riverview	Sarasota	Sarasota
Sarasota	Sarasota	Sarasota
Miami Palmetto Senior	Miami	Dade
Henry B. Plant	Tampa	Hillsborough
Jesuit	Tampa	Hillsborough

Venice	Venice	Saràsota
Winter Haven	Winter Haven	Polk
Winter Park	Winter Park	Orange

In addition we have spoken at meetings to teachers and department chairman from the following schools:

Dunedin	Dunedin	Pinellas
Eau Gallie	Melbourne	Brevard
Satellite	Satellite Beach	Brevard
Largo	Largo	Pinellas
Melbourne	Melbourne	Brevard
Merritt Island	Merritt Island	Brevard
Rockledge	Rockledge	Brevard
Boca Ciega	St. Petersburg	Pinellas
Dixie Hollins	St. Petersburg	Pinellas
Gibbs	St. Petersburg	Pinellas
Lakewood	St. Petersburg	Pinellas
St. Petersburg	St. Petersburg	Pinellas
Chamberlain	Tampa	Hillsborough
Hillsborough	Tampa	Hillsborough
Jefferson Comprehensive	Tampa	Hillsborough
C. Leon King	Tampa	Hillsborough
Leto Comprehensive	Tampa	Hillsborough
Robinson	Tampa	Hillsborough
Tampa Bay Arfa Vocational School	Tampa	Hillsborough
Titusville Astronaught	Titusville	Brevard
Titusville	Titusville	Brevard
East Bay	Riverview	Hillsborough

APPENDIX II

Recommended School Policy for Writing Skills

Purpose: To emphasize writing as an essential tool of communication in all subject areas.

Specific Writing Skills:

1. writing complete sentences
2. writing notes and assignments
3. spelling
4. using the dictionary
5. using apostrophes
6. using comma + conjunction to join independent clauses
7. using capitals
8. writing legibly

General Recommendations:

1. That every teacher require students to do some expository writing using correct paragraph form at least once a week.
2. That every teacher include mechanics in writing as part of the grade or as a separate grade on tests, essays, or specific writing assignments.
3. That every teacher refuse to accept papers that are not legible.
4. That every teacher mark mechanical errors in these skills on student papers. Occasionally, to save time, teachers may try one of the following:
   a. have students exchange papers for correcting
   b. have students proofread their own papers with a different color pen
   c. group grading
   d. check for only one skill
5. That the school purchase personal copies of a writing handbook such as the Plain English Handbook (about $1.00) for teachers for ready reference.

N.B. This recommendation was unanimously endorsed by the faculty at Gainesville High School

Office of
Instructional
Resources

MEMORANDUM

TO: Ward Hellstrom January 5, 1978

FROM: Jeaninne Webb

SUBJECT: Testing Composition Skills

Before a testing program is designed and tests are identified to be administered to a group of subjects, a clear statement of the purpose of the testing program should be developed. Seldom will a test suit all purposes; therefore, tests should be identified which will meet the stated goals. Probably the best example of a test, designed for a single purpose yet misused for several other purposes, was the Florida Twelfth Grade Test. It was designed as a placement test; scores were to be used for the academic advising of freshmen who entered the Universities of the state. Because of political and social pressures it became an admission, or screening, test in the late fifties. It was also used as an achievement measure of the instructional programs of secondary schools and public school districts within the state. This led to unfair comparisons among schools and county districts, and eventually the test scores became a weapon to be used by and against public school administrators.

It would seem reasonable to me that before the Ad Hoc Committee on Composition makes any recommendation for a testing program and identifies the test or tests to be used, that we decide what purposes we wish the program to serve. Possible uses are:

Screening: A test could be used to exclude students who are extremely weak in writing from enrolling in upper division programs which place high emphasis on these skills. They could be denied admission until they had demonstrated a certain proficiency on such an examination. This purpose would demand a test with high reliability.

Placement: A test could be used to place incoming students (freshmen and/or transfer students) in regular composition courses, special sections for remedial work and/or a writing laboratory. Because it would not exclude students, high reliability estimates are not as important as for a screening device. To get maximum usage, it should have good diagnostic qualities.

General Purpose Building A, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida 32611 904/392-0371

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYMENT AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EMPLOYER

Proficiency: A test could be administered sometime during the baccalaureate program, perhaps at the beginning of the junior year, which would determine the proficiency of the student as a writer. Failure to pass such a test would prohibit the student from being awarded a degree until he had presented evidence through course work and/or additional examination that he had developed the required proficiency. For this purpose, a test which includes a writing sample would be appropriate. The state system of Georgia uses such a procedure for both reading and writing skills. Criteria for success would have to be established locally.

Certification: A test could be administered at the end of the senior year which would certify that the student has acquired sufficient writing skills to enable him to perform adequately in the field of his chosen major or profession. Failure to succeed on this test would deny the baccalaureate degree. A test used for this purpose would demand high reliability and validity. Certeria for success would have to be established locally.

I have included a list of tests compiled by Sue Legg which may suit one or more of the purposes outlined above. She has included both objective and essay formated tests. Objective tests will predict essay scores fairly well and are more reliable. However, essays do provide unique information not tapped by objective examinations. We are willing to make recommendations if the committee wishes. We have also investigated costs and can make that information available.

RECEIVED
JAN 5 1978
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

WRITING TESTS: OBJECTIVE ITEMS

McGraw-Hill Basic Skills System: Writing

1. Content: 70 items in 45 minutes

   Spelling

   Language mechanics: capitalization, punctuation and grammar

   Sentence patterns; recognition of correct sentence construction

   Paragraph patterns: topic, development and concluding sentences. Appropriate sequence

2. Scoring and reliability: reliability about .70 on part scores. Little technical research.

3. Norms: Grades 11-14 with norms for college bound seniors, college freshmen, and two year college students. Norms are biased and local norms should be established.

4. Criticism: Appropriate for individuals who desire to enter college but may be deficient in essential skills.

College Board Test of Standard Written English (E.T.S.)

1. Content: 50 multiple choice items in 30 minutes.

   Spelling and capitalization not tested, agreement of tense, subject and verb, pronoun and antecedent

   Parallel structure

   Usage and diction

2. Scoring and reliability: Scaled scores range from 20 - 60. Reliability for the TSWE is .87.

3. Norms: The preliminary report does not include national norms. Results from 14 select colleges are reported.

4. Criticisms: This test discriminates best among students with low writing ability. It does not test organization, use of supporting detail, or distinguishing fact from opinion.

The New Purdue Placement Test in English (Houghton-Mifflin)

1. Content: 225 items in 65 minutes

   Punctuation
   Grammar
   Sentence structure
   Reading
   Vocabulary
   Spelling

2. Scoring and reliability: 8 scores including a total score are reported. Reliabilities are in the .90 range.

3. Norms: Grades 11 - 16. The norms were developed locally and were not appropriate for other schools.

4. Criticisms: Many of the items were of the right - wrong type which do not require recognition of the correct response. The test is used for placement in freshman English.

WRITING TESTS: OBJECTIVE PLUS ESSAY

CLEP Subject Examination in English Composition

1. Content: 120 multiple choice items in 90 minutes; an optional essay.

   Objective test

   Error recognition on style and mechanics
   Sentence conversion
   Paragraph analysis
   History of English language
   Use of bibliographic tools

   Essay

   Paraphrase a passage
   Organize two sets of information into separate paragraphs

2. Scoring and reliability: KR_{20} reliability is .87.

3. Norms:

4. Criticism: This exam is difficult and slightly speeded. It requires knowledge of technical terms such as "analysis of partition" and "synedoche". It may not be appropriate for transfer or non-traditional students.

College Board Achievement Test in English Composition (E.T.S.)

1. Content: 60 minutes plus an optional essay requires students to recognize:

   errors in usage
   ways to correct errors
   poor diction
   wordiness and cliche's
   faulty grammar

   Select the appropriate final line of a stanza of poetry

   rephrasing sentences
   arrange sentences in logical order
   correct a theme

2. Scoring and reliability: Reliability is .85. The objective sections are machine scored and the interlinear section is hand scored. Essays are scored regionally by a panel of English instructors.

3. Norms:

4. Criticisms: The emphasis of this test is on the organization of thought and the flow of good prose. The difficulty level is high and there is a substantial amount of reading in the test.

Sequential Tests of Educational Progress: STEP (E.T.S.): Objective items and optional essay

1. Content: 65 items in 40 minutes and an essay in 35 minutes.

   Mechanics of writing: spelling, capitalization, and punctuation

   English expression: form, diction, idiom, and structure. The best way to express an idea.

   Essay: There are four forms of the essay test. Topics require personal narrative, exposition, argument, and analysis. Sample essays are given as examples of levels of quality.

2. Scoring and reliability: Essay scoring is on a 7 point scale. Each score is weighted 50% on originality, 30% on style, and 20% on convention. Correlations with the objective test range from .61 - .70. STEP has a continuous scoring scale designed to facilitate growth studies. However, there is little normative data to support the scale. Reliabilities range from .87 - .94.

3. Norms: Mechanics of English stops at grade 12. English expression has norms for grades 13 - 14.

4. Criticism: Reviewers comments range from a trivial to an innovative test. Test correlates with reading comprehension and general aptitude.

College English Placement Test (Houghton-Mifflin): Objective items and optional essays

1. Content: 106 items in 45 minutes plus two essays requiring 25 minutes each.

   Little emphasis on spelling, punctuation, capitalization, or usage

   Selection of a subject for a composition

   Identification of dominant, subordinate and irrelevant topics

   Grouping topics

Judging transitions

Sentence expression

Verbal analogies

2. Scoring and reliability: There is no assistance for judging the quality of the essays. The objective tests are inactive forms of College Board Achievement Tests. Therefore, reliability coefficients are high.

3. Norms: These tests require the development of local norms.

4. Criticism: Reviewers felt this test was interesting and flexible with a good format.

WRITING TESTS: ESSAY

College Board Advanced Placement Tests (E.T.S.)

1. Content: Three essays requiring 3 hours and 21 objective items.

   The first essay is intended to measure a student's ability to read, understand and evaluate a critical passage.

   The second essay requires students to discuss the implications of a quotation.

   The third essay requires students to develop an idea from a topic sentence.

2. Scoring and reliability: Reliability for the objective tests is .50. Scoring by E.T.S.

3. Norms: This test is for advanced high school students. Norms for the test would be based on a sample of high ability students.

4. Criticisms: Both essay and objective tests cover literature topics only.

Regents Testing Program: Essay

1. Content: One essay in 45 minutes; choice of two topics

2. Scoring: See appendix. Examples of essays rated on a four point scale are given.

3. Norms: Local norms must be developed.

4. Criticisms: Non-available

Essay Criteria

I. Organization (40%)

- A. Narrowing the Subject
- B. Evidence of a Thesis
- C. Development of the Thesis
  1. Unity
  2. Logical Development
  3. Coherence
  4. Evidence

II. Rhetoric (40%)

- A. Diction
  1. Clarity
  2. Economy
  3. Precision
  4. Consistency
- B. Sentence Structure
  1. Clarity
  2. Variety
  3. Parallelism
- C. Paragraph
  1. Unity
  2. Logical Development: Appropriate Emphasis
  3. Coherence
- D. Point of View
  1. Appropriateness
  2. Consistency

III. Mechanics (20%)

- A. Spelling
- B. Punctuation
- C. Usage
- D. Vocabulary